

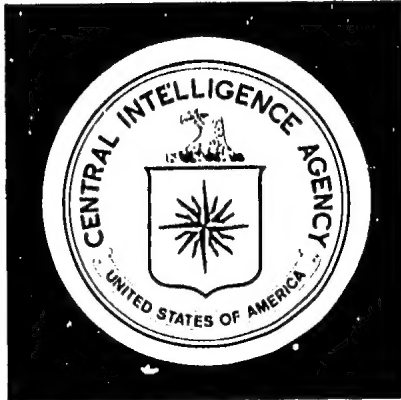
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Developments in Indochina

State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

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SOUTH VIETNAM

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The Communists are still concentrated south of Sa Huynh. Government and Communist troops play volley ball with one another one day and then fight the next. The An Quang Buddhists are thinking about a third force role and membership on the Council of Reconciliation.

NORTH VIETNAM

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Hanoi convenes its National Assembly.

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LAOS

5

Cease-fire to begin on 21 February. North Vietnamese troops are moving in on Paksong.

CAMBODIA

7

Government efforts to take the military initiative are making little progress. Lon Nol defends recent price rises.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

There has been little change in the military situation. In southern Quang Ngai Province, South Vietnamese relief forces continue to clear the area around Sa Huynh and have retaken additional high ground west of the village. The Communists remain entrenched south of Sa Huynh on Route 1, however,

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Be Careful of Strangers Bearing Gifts

During the three-day Tet holiday early this month, South Vietnamese soldiers in Kontum Province got together with troops from the North Vietnamese 66th Regiment [REDACTED]

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They played volley ball and exchanged small Tet gifts. The government troops were impressed with the apparent health, spirit, good appearance, and quality of equipment of the North Vietnamese. On 12 February, these same North Vietnamese troops launched strong attacks that produced heavy South Vietnamese casualties. This type of incident has cropped up in several other sectors of the country since the beginning of the cease-fire period. [REDACTED]

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Keeping An Quang's Options Open

A Saigon press account of 13 February indicates that the An Quang Buddhists are still uncertain about what part they should play in future political negotiations between the Saigon government and the Communists. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] An Quang had not yet decided whether to designate representatives to the National Council for National Reconciliation and Concord, [REDACTED]

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According to An Quang Senator Ton That Niem, the Church has not officially endorsed all of Quang's remarks, but agrees with his "fundamental idea" that An Quang should contribute members to the council if given the opportunity.

An Quang has so far been careful not to expose Buddhist thinking on post - cease-fire political developments. Nonetheless, the general attitude that has emerged during the past few weeks is that the Church would like to play a major role in the "third element," both in order to serve as a genuine counter-balance between the government and the Communists and to preserve and possibly increase its own base of power.

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An Quang leaders are also trying to keep their options open concerning President Thieu's latest political initiative. Four Buddhist senators attended the organizational meeting of the government's new "popular front" last week. Although they were careful to present themselves as "individuals" and indicated that the An Quang movement did not wish to commit itself, the senators apparently hope to continue their participation in the front. One senator told the US Embassy that he and his colleagues would "withdraw at once" if the front embarked on a course they considered unwise.

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NORTH VIETNAM

Hanoi's national assembly was called into session on 20 February to celebrate the "victories" of the past few weeks and to assign "new tasks" to the people. First accounts from Hanoi Radio indicate that although the rhetoric during the session will probably be even more flowery than usual, the meeting will turn out to be the usual rubberstamp affair. Nevertheless, some insight into Hanoi's future priorities should be gained from the reports delivered by Premier Pham Van Dong and others, and the assembly might also make (i.e., ratify) some changes in the government lineup.

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LAOS

The government and the Pathet Lao have reached agreement on a cease-fire. The agreement was scheduled to be signed at 2300 EST on 20 February, with the cease-fire itself going into effect at midnight Washington time on 21 February. Although the text of the agreement is not yet available, it presumably is based on the proposal that Lao Communist leader Souphanouvong made to Souvanna on 18 February. This proposal called for an immediate in-place cease-fire and bombing halt followed by discussions aimed at working out the details of a political settlement and a withdrawal of foreign military forces.

The government has long sought to negotiate separate military and political settlements. The Communist proposal appears to represent a compromise by providing for an initial cease-fire, while continuing to link a withdrawal of foreign forces to a political accord. The primary purpose of this interim agreement may be to give Souvanna additional time to overcome rightist objections to an even division of cabinet portfolios with the Communists and to the installation of Lao Communist leader Souphanouvong as his sole deputy prime minister in a new coalition government. Souvanna himself now appears ready to accept these terms.

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The Military Situation

Belated reports from south Laos indicate that North Vietnamese troops on 18 February captured hill-top positions some two miles north of Paksong on the Bolovens Plateau, but failed to take another hill just north of the town. Although government units still control most of the high ground around Paksong, the North Vietnamese will probably mount a concerted effort to retake Paksong before the cease-fire goes into effect.

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[REDACTED]

In the central panhandle, company-sized North Vietnamese attacks on 19 February forced elements of an eight-battalion irregular force to pull back from the immediate area of Muong Phalane. Since the Communists will probably be able to fend off further government advances toward Muong Phalane, it appears that cease-fire lines are well established in this sector.

To the north, Communist mortar and artillery fire continues to slow government units attempting to move toward the southern and western edge of the Plaine des Jarres. A five-battalion irregular force has moved onto a ridge near Xieng Khouangville, a town astride Route 4, some ten miles east of the Plaine.

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CAMBODIA

Government efforts to regain the initiative from Khmer insurgent forces continue to make little or no progress. On the east bank of the Mekong, Cambodian Army units are still cautiously assembling for an attack on the insurgent-held village of Banam and on other insurgent positions north of Banam along Route 15. Other government troops on the west side of the Mekong are making only slight headway in their efforts to reopen Route 1 between Phnom Penh and the river. The Cambodians have thus far suffered losses of 42 killed and 272 wounded in the fighting in that sector. Elsewhere government forces trying to clear sections of Route 2 north and south of the town of Takeo have yet to make any significant gains. [REDACTED]

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Economic Tremors

In an address to the nation on 20 February, Lon Nol defended the recent rise in the prices of POL products and asked that any opposition to the higher rates be confined to orderly protests sent through proper bureaucratic channels. The President's appeal probably was prompted in part by reports of looting of Chinese shops in Battambang Province following a hike in the price of rice and by demands by striking teachers in Phnom Penh for a cost-of-living allowance to meet the rapid rise in retail prices. Most of the city's students reportedly are sympathetic to their teachers' demands. [REDACTED]

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